



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# UNHONORED EDUCATIONAL HONORS

BY JAMES HENLE

*Professor of History*—I must confess that I found the style of your essay very dull and commonplace.

*Student (feebly)*—But that comes in English Lit.!

IN his annual report President A. Lawrence Lowell of Harvard emphasizes a point which has disturbed and distressed our educators for many years. In this country little attention is paid to high grades in college courses; the *summa* men, the *magna* men and the ordinary graduates stand upon an equal footing in the view of the general public and of the business world. If anything, the rank and file of the graduates have a little the better of it in common estimation.

In the case of graduates of professional and technical schools exactly the opposite is true. These men, to be sure, have been trained for some definite work, and the degree to which they have absorbed this training, roughly measured by their scholastic standing, may be taken to indicate their fitness for the tasks ahead. The purpose of college is more general and accordingly more difficult to achieve. Yet the popular verdict, as expressed in society's attitude toward those whom college has delighted to honor, is anything but favorable.

It is only fair to say that this opinion is shared by the honor men themselves. I cannot remember that my classmates of ten years and more ago who distinguished themselves in their studies felt that these were, as the mathematicians say, necessary and sufficient, or that the attainment of high scholastic standing was a matter of great importance. On the contrary, the best students were hurrying through their college work in order to be able to enter professional school a year earlier. For my own part, I must admit that the possession of a Phi Beta Kappa key has never seemed to me any reason why captains of industry should seek my services.

Clearly there must be something behind this distrust of our academic system. The Junker rule in Germany was certainly bad and it was resented by the common folk, but there seems to be every reason for supposing that the Junkers themselves believed in it. Our colleges, at least as institutions of learning, have lost the confidence not only of the general public, but even of that special class which has best adapted itself to their *régime*.

Perhaps, in some unconscious and unreasoning way, this is because our colleges have failed to reconcile educational practice with educational theory. They have "kept abreast of the times" by offering courses in aeronautics and in twentieth century literature, but they have not kept abreast of themselves and of their own best thought.

For years, to take one instance, it was usual to justify the time spent upon the classic tongues and higher mathematics by the statement that these studies served to "strengthen the mind." Experiments in educational psychology, however, demonstrated some years ago that training in one field does not "carry over" into another; studying solid geometry prepares a student to solve problems in solid geometry. It does not "strengthen the mind." It has no influence in any other direction except as the student uses this knowledge in astronomy or other related fields. It is apparent that if we really want to teach a young man to think clearly—and geometry was formerly supposed to do this—it is better to attempt this directly than to expect this to come as a vague byproduct of other work.

This is no plea for the elimination of mathematics and the classics and the substitution in their stead of commercial law and accounting. These are special studies that are as narrowing in their way as those others; they are no more "practical" than Homer except for those who intend to make direct use of them. It seems that Mr. G. K. Chesterton hit the mark exactly when he told Englishmen of cosmopolitan tastes: "By all means associate with Japanese generals if you desire to associate with Japanese generals. But if you want to meet someone who is different from you, jump over the garden wall and get acquainted with the old lady next door." In the same spirit an educator could say to a student: "You should certainly study Greek and ac-

counting, if what you want to learn is Greek and accounting. But if you are anxious to use your mind, tell me what you would do if you were to awake some morning and find yourself in Lloyd George's shoes."

Closely associated with this problem is the unfortunate tendency that some of our colleges have shown to take for their models the modern department store which carries in stock everything from pins to pianos. Probably university trustees like to be able to assert that a young man can obtain instruction in any field of knowledge at their institution, and there is much to commend in this idea. It is unfortunate, however, if a large part of the energy of a college is to be diverted to rivalry of this kind, if the establishment of a chair of Dutch at one is to be met by a course in Russian at another; if the fact that one college inaugurates a course in Icelandic sagas means that its neighbor must reply with a series of lectures upon Aztec hieroglyphics. The net effect, in fact, has been to multiply "cinch" courses, weaken the effect of collegiate training, and in the end undermine whatever prestige academic distinctions may possess.

It is probably inevitable that there be departments in a modern institution of learning. The tragic thing is that these should be repeated in the brains of its students, for when this is done their knowledge is effectively guarded against all use and the disrespect paid to college honors is completely justified. Yet these brain compartments, each hermetically sealed against related knowledge, will be built unless some common carrier is devised that will visit them all, unless some medium of exchange is found that will make classroom knowledge a living, circulating reality. The remarkable reception which Mr. H. G. Wells's *Outline of History* has received is proof of the demand for some broader and more comprehensive outlook on life than any single course or department can offer.

It is easy enough today to sympathize with the young man who protested against any criticism on the score of style of an essay written to fulfill the requirements of a course in history. Were there not instructors in the Department of English Literature who were supposed to concern themselves with his style? If he wrote an historical essay for these latter, that would be a

different matter; they could say anything they pleased about his style, but they could not legitimately and fairly take exception to his facts.

To many it will seem that there is a touch of burlesque in the exposition of this young man's point of view. Unhappily, it is merely a sober presentation of the attitude adopted by the majority of college students. It is difficult to blame them. They study biology and receive no suggestion of its influence upon history; they obtain their knowledge of economics from textbooks and correlate it neither with the lectures they hear on politics nor with what they may read in financial publications; Darwin, Tennyson, Karl Marx, and Mazzini are treated in separate courses and as isolated phenomena. Few institutions have taken even the obvious step of teaching their students to read the daily press intelligently.

To a great extent this is because we are still under the domination of the fact tradition. Many centuries have contributed to the idea that facts in themselves possess some mystic power and are valuable irrespective of whether we understand their proper relationship or their application. But a revolt is well under way. In history, for example, much less attention is now paid to dates and names; in their stead our students are learning to examine causes and conditions, to study not the conqueror but the influences which produced him. In other fields as well this movement is gaining headway. It remains only to recognize its validity and to extend it to our whole scheme of education. When this is done our endeavor will be not to fill the student's brain with as many facts as possible, but rather to assist him to comprehend and judge the forces which have created our present society and which are directing its development. With this as a background facts obtain some relevancy.

From this point of view we see that the problem which confronts President Lowell and every other educator would be comparatively easy to solve—were the students of a college numbered by the tens instead of by the hundreds or thousands. Society today pays little respect to the man upon whose diploma has been engraved *summa cum laude*, and it fails to do so because of the feeling, not expressed in exactly these terms, that he is

the product of a scholastic system as far removed from reality as that of the Chinese. But it would be a different matter if President Lowell could introduce a graduate to the world in a manner somewhat like the following:

"I know Samuel Henderson intimately. Except for the periods of our academic recesses he has spent half an hour with me every morning during the past four years. At such times we have discussed politics and religion, sociology, the natural sciences, psychology, literature, history and economics. We have not confined ourselves to a theoretical consideration of these subjects; we have followed the course of labor disputes in the daily newspapers, we have had the benefit of advice upon political issues from candidates for public office, we have talked to manufacturers, trade unionists, retailers and housewives on the subject of tariff legislation. During one summer vacation I had the pleasure of Mr. Henderson's company upon a trip to Ireland, where we studied at first hand the forces of nationalism at work.

"In my conversations with my young friend I have drawn extensively on my knowledge of the past and of the literatures of many nations. These references have almost invariably been linked with present occurrences of importance. In that way they not only have acquired an unusual interest for him, but have stimulated him to undertake a broad course of reading and, furthermore, have provided him with a background which has enabled him to assimilate what he has read.

"I have been impressed by the toughness and resiliency of Mr. Henderson's mind, by the clarity of his vision, by his lack of bias. During the four years I have known him he has achieved a remarkable mental growth and an enviable power both to perceive objects in their proper relations and to reduce to their primary factors complicated situations. I do not mean that Mr. Henderson and I see eye to eye upon the immigration problem nor upon the question of the League of Nations, but I have a very hearty respect for his opinions upon both these subjects. In social relations I have found Mr. Henderson courteous, agreeable, forbearing.

"It would be absurd for me to say that this young man is an expert in the field of economics or biology or in any field whatso-

ever. However, he is now admirably equipped for specialized study in any of those departments or for work in the commercial world where broadness of vision and sound judgment are essential.

"Gentlemen, in my opinion Mr. Henderson has fairly won the right to be termed educated."

Impractical? Yes, because President Lowell's day is not long enough to permit him to give half an hour to every student at Harvard. But it is highly practical in the sense that society would recognize the value of such training. And it seems certain that the closer our educational system comes to this method, the more respect will be accorded to those upon whom it confers honors.

A great deal has already been done in this direction. At President Lowell's own institution the general examination at the end of the senior year requires the student to correlate his knowledge, to review his past work, to take a survey of his own mind and his relation to society. At Columbia students may elect to study for honors; this means more intensive and intelligent application, the adoption of a broader point of view, frequent and intimate consultations with members of the faculty. Courses are being offered there and at other institutions that attempt to coördinate the work of various departments; recognition is being given to the idea that there is some relation between economics and politics, between politics and sociology.

In the changes that have been made in the entrance requirements for colleges an even greater amount of progress has been made. The classic tongues no longer monopolize attention—often not even Latin is required—though the study of mathematics is apparently held in as high esteem as ever. The striking point, however, is that some institutions have had the courage practically to abolish their entrance examinations and to substitute for them psychological tests which show not how many unrelated facts a student has been able to remember, but his or her ability and possibilities. For everywhere the question which the world puts to the college man is being sensed not as "What do you know?" but as "What can you learn to do?"

JAMES HENLE.